

PesTopics: Fall Webworm

“Tent” Caterpillar Mostly Aesthetic

Caterpillar tents can sometimes be seen around the Okanagan in late summer or fall. Although many people blame the “tent caterpillar” the tents are actually created by an insect known as fall webworm. Unlike true tent caterpillars, **fall webworm rarely causes severe damage**, and constructs tents on the outer portion of branches rather than in the forks.



Fall webworm populations are cyclical, with higher numbers appearing every few years. They feed on a wide variety of trees and shrubs, constructing a tent to help protect themselves from the more than 80 types of natural parasites and predators that help keep populations in check. Tents may start to appear in June or July but are not usually noticeable until late summer or fall, thus the name “fall webworm”.

Caterpillars are greenish or yellow with long white hairs. Avoid touching hairs with bare skin, as they may cause an irritating rash.

Control:

Fall webworm is primarily an aesthetic problem, since feeding is usually limited to a few branches and rarely causes any serious defoliation. Given enough time, natural enemies will bring this insect under control. **For this reason, Parks does not apply pesticides against fall webworm.**

In general, we do not treat tents that are in natural areas, or high up in trees. Our gardeners may prune out small webs and destroy them (if they can be reached). Another tactic is to blast the tents with water or poke them with a pole, to expose caterpillars to predators. Some experts recommend using a long stick or pole, with a nail inserted crosswise, which can be poked into the colony and twisted to wrap the webbing around the pole. City of Kelowna Parks staff has observed birds feeding on the caterpillars almost immediately after the tents have been removed.

If you do wish to apply a pesticide on your own trees, the bacterial insecticide, Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) can be effective when larvae are young. Be sure to follow all label instructions when applying any pesticide.